



CONTAINER VEGETABLE GARDENING

Larry Bass, Extension Horticultural Specialist

Many people who live in an apartment, condominium, or mobile home do not grow a vegetable garden because space is not available for a garden plot. Lack of yard space is no excuse for not gardening, since many kinds of vegetables can be readily grown in containers. In addition to providing five hours or more of full sun, attention must be given to choosing the proper container, using a good soil mix, planting and spacing requirements, fertilizing, watering, and variety selection.

Containers are available in many different sizes, shapes, and materials. All containers, whether clay, wood, plastic, or ceramic, should have an adequate number of holes in the bottom for proper drainage. Additional holes should be drilled or punched in containers that do not drain quickly after each watering. Drainage is reduced when the container is set on a solid surface such as a cement or patio floor. Raising the container one or two inches off the floor by setting it on blocks of wood will solve this drainage problem.

The size of the container will be determined by the vegetable grown. Generally, most vegetables grown in the soil can be grown in containers as long as ample space is provided for root development. Shallow rooted crops like lettuce, peppers, radishes, and herbs need a container at least 6 inches in diameter with an eight inch soil depth. Bushel baskets, half barrels, wooden tubs, or large pressed

paper containers are ideal for growing tomatoes, squash, pole beans, and cucumbers.

The ideal planting medium for containers should provide rapid drainage with sufficient water retention to keep the root zone uniformly moist. Most container gardeners have found that a "soilless" potting mix works best. In addition to draining quickly, "soilless" mixes are lightweight and free from soil-borne diseases and weed seeds. These mixes can be purchased from garden centers in various sizes under many different brand names.

The do-it-yourself individual can make a planting medium by mixing equal parts of sand, loamy garden soil, and peat moss. The mix should be heated in an oven for 1 hour at 210°F to kill any bacteria, fungi, insects, or weed seeds.

Planting and spacing requirements for most vegetables can be found on the seed packet or plant tag. A container can sustain only a certain number of plants, therefore, it is important to limit the number of plants based on the container size and the eventual size of the plant at maturity. Always plant more seed than needed in each container, because there is seldom 100% germination and emergence. After the seeds have sprouted and foliage of seedlings is touching, thin plants to the desired number.

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